

The Daily Gazetteer.

MONDAY, MARCH 12. 1739.

No 1159.

Conclusion of the Letter from a West-Country CLOTHIER on the late Riot in Wiltshire.



THE 3d Thing asserted by our Author, as the Cause of Riots, is called *Oppression of the Poor by their rich Masters*; and these Oppressions are said to be practised towards 'em in divers Shapes, viz. *Entering into Combinations to lower Wages*; *Not paying them their Wages*; or else, *Paying them in Truck, by Goods at an advanced Price*.

As to the 1st and 2d of these relating to Combinations, or not paying 'em their Wages, I must declare myself an absolute Stranger to any such Methods of Practice; and unless the Author is capable of producing proper Vouchers for the Support of such a Charge, the Reproach must revert upon himself.

That the Workmen are able in a dull Season of Trade, when Work is scarce, &c. to make their Wages as comfortable as in a quick Time of Trade, when their Hands are full, is not to be supposed; for in the Clothing Trade, as in other Employments, the Value of Labour has its Ups and Downs, according to the Demand there is for it, the same as any other Commodity; as for Instance: On a Revival of Things, the Workman soon sees the agreeable Change, by a full Employ, and advanced Prices; but if the Necessity of the Times require, and the Master advertises his Servants, that he can give but 14d per Yard, instead of 15 or 16d must this be called *Oppression*, when at the same time the Workman is at full Liberty to make the most of his Labour elsewhere? — Again; When the Workman has finished his Piece of Work, if the Master pays him his agreed Price, what Ground of Complaint has the Workman? If the Master refuses to pay him, the Remedy is easy, by an immediate Recourse to the Magistrate, who will always do Justice to the Workman. — But if, on the contrary, the Workman has ill-wrought that Piece, or feloniously detain'd from the Master any Part of his Stuff, every such Master has a Right to expect a Reparation to be settled by a Magistrate, unless (as is frequently the Case) the Workman (rather than have his Perfidies exposed) chooses to agree the Damage with his Master, at a small Allowance: But will this be called *keeping back by Fraud*, or *oppressing an hired Servant*? No; so far from it, that I am apt to believe, the Lenity shewn to criminal Workmen, upon Injuries done their Masters, has been a great Cause of the several Riots and Insults made upon 'em of late Years; and am forced to conclude, that if the Clothiers, instead of expressing this false Pity to the Persons of such Offenders, had prosecuted them for Felony only, we had ere now got rid of the greatest Number of those idle and immoral Wretches, that generally turn out the Ringleaders of such Assemblies; and by this Time should have had very little to fear from a Mob.

As to the honest and industrious Part of our Work-People, we are so far from considering them as Slaves, &c. that we conclude 'em as useful Members of Society, and not only the Riches of the Kingdom, but the Means of our Support. No doubt, but the Decay of Trade must necessarily affect them; and whilst thus, it cannot but beget an additional Concern in the Mind of every conscientious Master, to see his Workman in Distress, as well as himself. And the Masters are so far from being of the Complexion the Author suggests, by making the Deadness of Trade to operate in the Oppression and Destruction of the Poor, that it's well known, the Impoverishment of many reputable Masters, is to be ascrib'd to their keeping on Business, without any other View, but their Fenderness to the Poor, and only for their Employment and Service.

For my own Part, I dread to think what would have been the Consequence of Things in the Country, had the Masters in general, who have been batten'd with large Stocks of Goods, less'n'd their Trades in Proportion, as Prudence might have directed: What then would have become of our Poor, but the Land-holders reflect, whose Estates, without

Trade, would be found a very incompetent Provision for them!

The Clothiers are not oblig'd to carry on Trade to the Ruin of themselves and Families, as has been the Misfortune of a great many hundred Manufacturers, within a few Years, in this Kingdom: This may perhaps gratify the Envy of a few, (who can't bear to see a Tradesman live) but it cannot serve the Interest of any; for the Impoverishment of the Manufacturers, and the Loss of the Manufacture, generally go together. Some Branches of our Woollen Fabricks are quite lost, and others going along with our Wool; but very fatal to England will be such a Farewel of Trade, and which is apprehended to be too near upon the Crisis. And indeed there seems to be but two Things left us to apply to, as Means to preserve and increase our Foreign Trade; the one is securing our Wool from falling into our Rivals Hands; and the other, by lowering the Prices of our Workmanship: If the Clothiers apply for the former, they are answer'd, That will sink the Price of their Wool, disabie their Tenants from paying their Rents, &c. And if a Reduction in the Price of Labour is attempted, we are charged by our Author with *Injustice*, and are said hereby to be driving the Poor on to this riotous Method of revenging themselves upon their Masters for their Oppressions, &c.

But there is one Thing I am led here to observe, as what must affect the Poor much more than the Penny per Yard abated, and contribute much more to the late Disorders, viz. That at the Time of the Rising, there were (as I've been inform'd) not less than 60 or 70 Looms standing still, for Want of Employment, in that Neighbourhood. — And without some Regard to be had for the Preservation of our Foreign Trade, I despair of seeing our Hands better filled; tho' I hope no one will interpret this in the Nature of a Menace, seeing we should be glad, were it in our Power, to extend our Trades, as well for our own, as our Workmen's Advantage: For the Body of Clothiers never combined, that ever I cou'd learn, either to distress the Government, our Land-holders, or the Poor. And here let me tell the Author, that the Body of Clothiers have merited a different Sort of Treatment, than to be traduc'd as Tyrants, or vilified as Oppressors; tho' I can scarce help smiling at the Weakness and Partiality of the Author, who, tho' he won't allow of the late Method used by the Government in quelling the Insurrection of the Workmen against us, yet is, and almost with the same Breath, calling in the Aids of publick Authority to reduce the Masters to Order, and to force them to do Justice, at least for the future; who further instructs us, that both Justice and good Policy require, that rich Oppressors should be properly punished, as well as poor Rioters. — The Injuries and Scandal of such Hints, I shall leave to every candid Reader.

I proceed to remark our Author in what he seems so very sanguine upon, viz. the Advantage we make of Trade. — I shall not expatiate upon his whimsical and unapplicable Method of settling, and ascertaining to the Publick, *what clear Profit the Clothier has*, but give him a few Hints, which will partly serve to let him into the Secret of our Gains; and if he has Courage enough to make the Purchase, I will venture to insure him the Near Produce on Four-fifths of the Woollen Goods now made, and that have been made for seven Years past, in the three Western Counties of *Wilt, Somerset and Gloucester*, for Three per Cent. per Ann. on the Stock employ'd in those Trades. Nay, I'll go further, and engage to deliver him several Hundred Thousand Pounds worth of Woollen Goods, at Five per Cent. less than Prime Cost.

Tho' it's in Justice to the State of Trade, as we'll as the Characters of those Gentlemen of Worth and Honour, who are so unhappy as to have any Concern in the Business of Cloth-making, and thereby exposed to the Envy of many, and the Injuries of common Fame, to divulge these melancholy, but real Truths, as likewise to remove those unjust Apprehensions unthinking Persons are liable to fall into from the Author's laying the Cause of the late Tumults to the Account of the Clothiers, or their Oppressions, &c. less could not, much more might be

urged, and supported by great Numbers of Gentlemen out of Trade, who are best acquainted with the State of the Woollen Manufactures in England. So that we are obliged to call upon the Author of this Essay, to produce Facts, in Support of such a Defamation, or publicly retract, and ask Pardon of the Gentlemen he has thus publicly injur'd.

I come now to consider the Article of *Trucking*. This I own to be a Practice not only illegal, but scandalous, and injurious to Trade; what is attended with worse Consequences by far to the fair Trader, than the Workman that complies with it; and what we should be glad to see an effectual Stop put to. — But as we can't call every Thing (that's illegal) oppressive, I am fully persuaded that the Majority of the Work-People, have no Reason to complain upon this Head; nor could this be the Cause of their Rising. — For as the Workmen knows beforehand the Disadvantages on which he takes Goods in Payment, so he knows also that the Quality of the Workmanship, accepted by such Masters, generally repays him, with Interest, for the Loss he sustains upon such Goods.

I would not be understood here pleading for a Liberty of paying in Goods, and heartily wish our Laws were so strict, and the Execution of those Laws so effectual, as would remove every Ground of Suspicion and Complaint on that Head; for I am satisfy'd the Interest of the fair Trader, as well as the Reputation of the Manufacture, consists very much in preventing all such clandestine Methods in Working. And I am very glad to hear, that a Body of Clothiers in the next * County, are so heartily disposed and engaged to put a Stop hereto; but am afraid the Work-People are but too well reconciled to the Payments of their Trucking Masters, or they would have accepted the Offer made them, viz. That if they would but give in their Informations against such as made them Payments in Goods, the Clothiers there would assist to carry on such Prosecutions at their own Expence; and at the same Time they were promised, not only a Security from such Payments in future, but Employment too, if by such Informations they were turn'd out of Work. But, I say, were the Author to consider this in his own Light, as an Oppression upon the Workmen, yet it's stupid to affirm it the Cause of the Riot at *Milkbam*, seeing neither Mr. Colthurst, nor any Gentleman upon whom Depredations were committed, ever made any other Payments, than ever I could learn, than in Money; and if this were the Cause of Complaint, why were any other struck at, but those who were Delinquents?

And to me it's almost as ridiculous to affirm, that the Oppressions pretended to have been in the Clothiers, could be a Cause of that riotous Assembly under any Light. Who will have the Front to say, that abating *One Penny a Yard* must, in its Consequences, bring upon the Clothiers the whole Body of Shearmen, whose Wages have been the same Time immemorial; or that such an Abatement is a sufficient Reason for the Resentments and Plunders of Carpenters, Bricklayers, Tylers, Labourers in Husbandry, &c.? But it's easy to comprehend their Views to be Plunder; for after Mr. Colthurst had signed (or offer'd to do it) for the Price they demanded, yet this would not satiate them, nor secure him from their Violences; and it's easy to perceive, if they had not been seasonably interrupted, not only the Clothiers, but every one else would have been laid under Contributions, and have felt the dismal Effects of their Avarice and Violence.

Thus have I attempted to remove the Charges which our Author, without Truth or Conduct, has been pouring out upon the Government, its Magistrates, and the Trading Body. I am sensible my Talent is unequal to the Subject; but seeing better Hands have declin'd the Task, I hope the Candour of my Friends, for whose Service this was design'd, will indulge what is defective, it being my first Essay in publick.

I should have gone on to the Consideration of the 4th Head, which our Author says, may be the Cause of a Riot, viz. a *Spirit of Licentiousness* and

* From in Somersetshire.



Pater-noster-Row.